

# Essential Elements to Promote Inclusive Education

Fighting for the right of children with intellectual disabilities  
to be included in the schools of their communities



CATALYST  
FOR INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATION



Ensuring quality education for children with an intellectual disability is a global issue. Far too many children receive no educational services at all, while others are segregated and stigmatized in special schools and institutions. The Catalyst for Inclusive Education is Inclusion International's program to change this situation.

**We want school systems:**

- that are inclusive of all learners;
- where all children are welcome;
- where children learn in common learning environments with their peers;
- where teachers are prepared and supported to teach a diverse group of learners.

We have identified the following elements as essential for schools to welcome children with intellectual disabilities and become inclusive. Working towards inclusive schools in your community requires:

**Vision**

Children with intellectual disabilities, including those with more significant disabilities, can be supported in regular classes. Schools which welcome all children help to create societies which value diversity. Schools need to constantly work to eliminate barriers which keep some children from benefitting academically or socially. Investments in supporting inclusion is a way to strengthen schools for all students.



## Law & Policy

International law supports the right to inclusive education. Most countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which guarantees an “inclusive education system at all levels”. But this is not enough! National law and policy is required which ensures:

- one education system – not a separate “special education” system;
- funding mechanisms which support inclusion by supporting teachers and students;
- appeal procedures and accountability mechanisms so families can challenge discriminatory practice.

## School Practices

Schools foster a culture of respect, cooperation and inclusion amongst all staff and students. Physical and other barriers are minimized, and individual supports provided. School administrators are knowledgeable about inclusive education and lead the school’s efforts to include all learners. Teachers receive training and support to plan and deliver instruction to all students. Collaboration and problem solving are part of the school culture. Educational assistants and specialized material and technology are provided when it is needed. Interventions are available to support learners who have difficulties with academic learning and/or managing their behaviours.

## Classroom Practices

Teachers accommodate the needs of every student, either through universal design for learning or through adjustments and accommodations to meet individual needs. Teachers must:

- differentiate lessons so that all students can participate;
- set appropriate expectations for students depending on their unique learning needs;
- develop individualized learning plans with achievable goals;
- use appropriate assessment approaches for each student;
- promote cooperative learning by grouping students for different lessons;
- encourage peer support for all students.

## Partnerships

Achieving inclusive school systems requires transformation at multiple levels: law and policy; allocation of resources; training of teachers and all school staff; school culture; and, classroom practice. They must all be based on a common vision. Leadership can come from many sources, but no one group can make change alone. Moreover, we know from educational systems which are achieving considerable success that this transformation requires sustained effort over several years and continuing openness to learning from experience about what could be done better.

Working together, advocacy groups including associations of parents of children with disabilities, associations of adults with disabilities, Ministries of Education, local education authorities, teachers and community leaders can all contribute to the transformation. To raise expectations for children with intellectual disabilities, we need to recognize that:

- parents may need support to learn that their children have the right to an inclusive education and that they develop best in an inclusive setting;
- Ministries of Education may need support to understand the implications and effects of

- international law and the way that a focus on inclusion can benefit education for all;
- non-government organizations (NGOs) which support programs for people with disabilities may need to consider how their resources can support inclusion and to recognize the negative impact of funding education programs based on a 'category of disability' approach;
  - teachers and school leaders who have successfully included diverse students in a common learning environment may need to be supported to share their success stories with others.

### **Effective Advocacy: Individual; Community; National**

The transition to inclusive school systems needs to overcome prejudice, outmoded attitudes, and long-standing practice. The focus must be on promoting attitudes and practices that have been proven to ensure the greatest success for all students. This requires advocacy at multiple levels. Advocacy may be collaborative or confrontational. It is preferable to use collaborative strategies but to know what other options, such as legal challenges, are available when cooperative change is blocked.

- Individual advocacy can ensure that one child is accepted into a regular classroom and school. This will not transform the system but can serve as a useful demonstration that inclusion can work.
- Community advocacy can help to make one school or group of schools more inclusive and thus provide a model for the broader community.
- National/state advocacy is necessary to ensure changes to law, policy, funding and teacher training are made since they are prerequisites for transforming the entire education system.

Inclusion International is committed to supporting a global effort to achieve inclusive schooling for children with intellectual disabilities through the Catalyst for Inclusive Education Initiative.

For more information visit: [www.catalystforeducation.ca](http://www.catalystforeducation.ca)

